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Development of the Performance of Opera  
in the United States from the Settlement  
of the Colonies to the Civil War

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DEVELOPMENT OF THE PERFORMANCE OF OPERA IN THE  
UNITED STATES FROM THE SETTLEMENT OF THE  
COLONIES TO THE CIVIL WAR

BY

GLEN CHRISTY

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THESIS

FOR THE

DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF MUSIC

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SCHOOL OF MUSIC

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

1915





UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

June 1,

1905.

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER MY SUPERVISION BY

GLEN CHRISTY,

ENTITLED DEVELOPMENT OF THE PERFORMANCE OF OPERA IN THE UNITED  
STATES FROM THE SETTLEMENT OF THE COLONIES TO THE CIVIL WAR.

IS APPROVED BY ME AS FULFILLING THIS PART OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE

DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF MUSIC.

H. F. Schwartz

Instructor in Charge

APPROVED:

Lawrence Erb

HEAD OF DEPARTMENT OF THE SCHOOL OF MUSIC.





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# EARLY DEVELOPMENT OF OPERA IN THE UNITED STATES FROM THE SETTLEMENT OF THE COLONIES TO THE CIVIL WAR

## CHAPTER I

### THE BEGINNING OF OPERA IN AMERICA

The History of Opera in America is found almost wholly in New York and New Orleans. The first operatic performances in America were not Italian but English operas. On December 3, 1750, the "Beggar's Opera", which had great success in England, was performed in New York. This performance was followed by a series of other "Ballad Operas", all taken from English sources. To New Orleans belongs the credit of introducing operas of the French and Italian School into America. In 1791 that City supported a troupe of Comedians and singers, who, in all probability, were vaudeville performers. It is not at all unlikely that at times they gave an opera of Grety or Boieldiers. In 1810 Paisiello's setting of "The Barber of Seville" was given, and from about this time on New Orleans has had regular performances of Grand Opera. The New Orleans Companies have traveled much during their seasons, and gave to New York, in the early years, (1827), a taste of French



Opera. In the year of 1790 we find that the operatic performances in New York had advanced from the early form of ballad operas, which were often the patch work of a half dozen composers, and had begun to perform the unified artworks of Arnold, Storace, Shield, and Dibdin. During the days of the Revolution the English regimental bands often assisted in the orchestra at operatic performances. About 1793 Philadelphia began imitating New York, and has continued to do so. In the year 1799 appeared one of America's<sup>first</sup> operas. This was written by Victor Pellisier, an Englishman, who was a horn player in the New York opera orchestra. The libretto was furnished by a Mr. Dunlap. It is not our purpose to trace the inception of native opera, but it is of passing interest to note that native opera appeared at this early date. At the beginning of the Nineteenth Century operatic troupes came into existence, which traveled between New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore. On November 12, 1823, John Howard Payne's "Clari, the Maid of Milan", the Melodrama containing the song "Home Sweet Home", was produced in New York; and March 3, 1825, New York heard a real great opera, "Der Freischutz", which had won success in Germany. It was adapted with many alterations, and was often given without singing. That is, it was recited, (as a melodrama), to music.





## CHAPTER II

### GARCIA'S OPERA COMPANY

Signor Garcia brought his Company of Italian singers to New York in November of 1825, and began the performances of grand opera proper. The Company opened with performances of "Il Barbier de Seviglia". Garcia's Company was one worthy of particular note as far as the principals were concerned. In this Company was Agrisani, one of the most famous bass singers of his day; Signoretta Garcia, who later became the great Madame Malibram, one of the world's greatest contraltos; and Garcia himself was one of the first class tenors of his day.

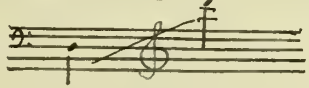
Since Madame Malibram<sup>1,2</sup> gained her first fame in New York, and did much to show New York what real singing was, it may not be amiss to sketch briefly her life. Her

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1. Groves Dictionary of Music, page 33; edited by A. Fuller Maitland; published by Macmillan Co., New York, 1907.

2. Great Singer, page 9, by George T. Ferris, second series; published by D. Appleton & Co., New York, 1897.



father, Manuel Garcia, was a Spanish Jew, who had arisen to fame in Paris as a tenor di forza e di grazia. In parts as Othello, Almariva and even in high baritone parts, he is said not to have had an equal. Under his tutoring Signoretta Garcia began as a chorus singer in Italian Opera. Pasta, the greatest singer of her day, became ill, and Garcia offered the services of his daughter. Signoretta Garcia sang so well that she was engaged for the rest of the season at 500 Pounds. Her fortune at this time was very low, and she was thinking seriously of marrying a humble orchestra player. Fortunately, her father projected the scheme of Italian Opera in America, and, on November 29 of the same year in which she made her debut, she made her first appearance in Park Theater in New York. She had good technic, sang very dramatically, and in all respects was an accomplished singer. She had a contralto voice of three octaves -  - and in private it is said that she could even surpass this range. As an Actress she was equally gifted in grandeur or pathetic parts. She was one of the most beautiful women that New York had seen upon the stage, and she was of unusually good character. In March, 1826, she married a French merchant, "Monsieur Malibram", and it was under this name that all Europe worshipped her. In New York she became popular under the name "Signora". Shortly after her marriage her husband went





into bankruptcy, and Madame Malibram turned a deaf ear to the pleadings of her father to leave her husband. Garcia left her in disgust, and took his Company to Mexico.

Madame Malibran gave concerts and tried for some time to support herself and her husband, but seeing that he ~~husband~~ was not trying to help himself, she left him and sailed for Paris, arriving there in 1827. Here began her European success.

Garcia's Company performed "Il Barbiere de Seviglia" twice a week for nearly a year, and from time to time added "La Cenerentola" by Rossini, "Othello", "Semaramide", and "Don Giovanni". Each gave additional delight to the American audience and added popularity to "Signora". While <sup>the</sup> principals were stars, the chorus and orchestra were exceedingly bad. A criticism of their performances says that they had a pianist play the piano for the sole purpose of keeping the orchestra in tune. The orchestra was trying to Garcia, and he rushed out of his part on several occasions to the foot-lights, and made the orchestra repeat some clumsily handled portion of the opera. Thus the operatic education of New York started. During Garcia's stay in New York, the public had encouraged many other artists to come there, and they had heard much good concert work.



## CHAPTER III

## MRS. AUSTIN AND THE ENGLISH OPERA COMPANY

Two years later (1837) the Italian Opera Company was succeeded by an English Opera Company of whom Mrs. Austin was a member. Mrs. Austin's first appearance in New York was made in Park Theater where Madame Malibran had gained her first fame. She had a Mezzo Soprano voice of a delicious quality, and she sang in the best style of the Anglo-Italian School of her day. Mrs. Austin was a very beautiful woman of the Anglo-Saxon type, and she was particularly admired as Ariel. The operas in which she appeared were, "The Marriage of Figaro", "Oberon", "Cinderella", "Tancredi", and "Dido". Rossini's music was adapted by Mr. Charles Horn, an English tenor and musician who was prominent in New York during the second quarter of the Nineteenth Century. Mrs. Austin remained in New York for about five years, and was in constant favor, because of her beauty and charming manner. She was neglected, however, at first. The New York public had established itself as having the exclusive right of judging the worthiness of an artist. If an artist appeared first in





Boston, Philadelphia, or some neighboring city, it was taken for granted that the artist thereby acknowledged inferiority. Mrs. Austin made this mistake and if it had not been for the efforts of her manager, she might not have been recognized. This manager, Mr. Berkley, was a good writer, and his tasty criticisms brought for her the recognition which she deserved.

Mrs. Austin's rival in New York, Madame Feron, also had a marked success. She had a great European reputation and, when she sailed for America, was considered the third best singer in Europe. As a vocalist Mrs. Austin was no comparison for her. Madame Feron's misfortune was her homely features, and accordingly Mrs. Austin was able to hold her own against her rival. Madame Feron made her first appearance at Park Theater in "Floretta" during the month of November, 1828, and made an excellent impression.

In 1830 a French Opera Company had a brief run in New York. The Company had no star singers, nor any artists at all with them, but they gave New York a chance to hear French Opera. New York gave these performances severe and discreet criticisms, thus showing that the work of former artists had not been in vain. After the French Opera, New York had further appearances of Mrs. Austin and Madame Feron. "Cinderella" had a run of forty-five nights, and was brought to an end by the illness of Mrs. Austin, who then disappeared permanently from New York.



## CHAPTER IV

### RICHMOND THEATER

Richmond Theater, in the suburbs of New York, was made over from the former Villa home of Aaron Burr after his pitiful ruin. This theater became a sort of condemned place of entertainment, and ladies who cared for their reputation did not attend the performances given there. During 1832, while Burr was still alive, this theater became the scene of the first complete staging of Italian Opera, by a Company which was recognized by New York papers as a New York Company. On October 6, 1832, this Company made its appearance in Rossini's Opera "La Cenerentola." Montessor, the tenor and manager of the Company, had a light lyric voice of a very agreeable timbre, and a fairly good style of vocalization. He had, however, a very manly appearance, and at once became a favorite. The prima donna, Albina Stella, had a very good voice and a nice style of vocalization; she was unable, however, to produce any impression on the public. On the 17th of October, Pedrotti appeared as Elsia in Mercadantes Opera "Elisa e



Claudio" and produced a sensation - the first since the appearance of Garcia. She had sung only in Bologna, and Lisbon, and had but little reputation before she came to New York. She had a fine Mezzo Soprano voice of sympathetic quality and although her style was not finished, she had a dramatic style that enabled her to dominate the stage. She was a tall, handsome woman with brilliant flashing black eyes, which aided her equally well in comedy or dramatic parts. The primo bass of the Company, "Fornari", who afterwards gained a reputation in Europe, was hardly less successful. He had a noble ringing voice with a fine Italian style of vocalization. New York women claimed that he was the handsomest man that ever lived. However true this may have been, it probably served him as well as did his voice to make him popular.

With this Company's orchestra came some musicians whose work was probably of as much importance, if not more, to New York's musical education as were the singers, because New York had heard very little good instrumental music. Baglioli, who afterwards became a very successful singing master in New York, was director, and Rapetti, an accomplished violinist, was concert master and leader of the orchestra at all operatic performances. He was also an excellent concert performer. Casolani was much admired as a double bass player, and his playing actually brought that instrument into the esteem of the New York people, who before had considered





it valuable only to support and emphasize the fundamental harmony. No one before him had thought of playing this instrument without a glove. Casolani was a very handsome man, and while playing turned back his sleeve, for the double purpose of convenience and of displaying his finely shaped wrist. For the first time this instrument came into favor with the ladies. Casolani and Fornarsi probably did the most to teach the belles of New York, the road to Richmond Theater, says a critic of that time. Montessor's Company was a favorite, but, through mismanagement and lack of support, it failed.



## CHAPTER V

## THE SCOTCH PRIMA DONNA (MRS. WOODS)

The Scotch prima donna, who had gained a reputation in London as Miss Paton, appeared at Park Theater in September, 1833. She had a powerful voice of wonderful range, and with an agreeable quality. Her vocalization was only fair, but her voice enabled her to hold her own with all but the best Italian singers in dramatic parts. She was a finely built woman, but not handsome. Her stage presence, however, pleased her audience. When she came to this country she was married to Lord William Lenox who was often cruel to her. She obtained a divorce from Lord Lenox a short time after her arrival in New York, and married Joseph Woods, who possessed a fine tenor voice. The Woods became very popular in New York, and their performances were very profitable both to themselves and to the opera house owners of Boston, Philadelphia, and New York. They sang "Cinderella", "The Marriage of Figaro", and "The Barber of Seville". Later they were joined by Mr. Brough, an Irish bass singer, who possessed a very good voice but





little technique and dramatic ability. With his help they sang English versions of "La Somnambula" and attained the greatest success which had ever been attained in America by an Opera Company. Bellini's music along with good librettos, which he was fortunate in securing, gave a new joy to the hearing of his operas, and "La Somnambula" was the delight of the English Colonies. The glory of the Woods came to a close, however, and they were driven from the stage (1836) of Park Theater by a riot caused by the jealousy between other artists and themselves.



## CHAPTER VI

### OPERA BY SUBSCRIPTION

Lorenzo Da Ponte, an Italian poet of minor order, author of the libretto of "Don Giovanni", had been exiled from Italy because of some satirical sonnets, which he had written, and had come to New York, where he had become quite a favorite. He was interested in Montessor's Opera venture, and, after it failed, did all that he could to establish opera by subscription. He succeeded and a subscription was formed, land was purchased, and an opera house built, which was open to the public in the autumn of 1833. The company, known as Rivafinoli troupe, took its name from the Cavaliere di Rivafinoli; who was its manager. He was a very extravagant manager and spent enormous sums decorating the house. Special men were imported from Italy to decorate the interior. Seats were furnished in plush; in fact, it was one of the most elegantly furnished theaters before of or since its time. The Company had no first or even good second class singers. The press criticized them severely and after worrying through one season, the Company was dropped, and the fine theater used for more base purposes.



## CHAPTER VII

### HAVANA OPERA COMPANY

In the Spring of 1848 the Havana Opera Company returned to New York and began performances at "Niblos Theater". This Company made regular visits to New York for some years. The object of the manager was to keep his Company together during the season of ill health in the West Indies. Thus the manager gave his performances, with the object of making them popular, and obtaining expenses for the upkeep of his Company. The visit in 1848 was marked by the appearance of the great tenor "Salvi". Salvi was one of the most remarkable tenors who appeared in New York, ranking second only to Mario, who appeared sometime later in New York. Salvi was in middle age when he sang in New York but his voice still possessed its full vigor. It was a tenor voice of the highest quality, and left little to be desired. It was distinctly masculine, yet tender and full of sympathy and seraphic loftiness. As a vocalist he was among artists of the second rank. His presence was manly and dignified, and he was a capable actor. It was, however, his voice that





captivated and moved his audiences. He was heard in America at different intervals for several years, always singing before a popular audience, the admittance generally being fifty cents, and never more than a dollar. He exerted a strong and beneficial influence upon the education of the New York public. His influence was probably the greatest of any artist, taken generally because of the cheapness of the admission which allowed most every one who wished to hear him.

With this Company appeared Signora Steffanone, an excellent soprano. She seemed to have all the requirements for becoming a great prima donna, but as time went on she deteriorated very rapidly. Signora Steffanone at her best had a voice of a very pleasing quality, and a style equally pleasing. Occasionally she arose to grandeur and aroused her audience to enthusiasm.

In this same year (1848) Max Maretzek made his appearance in New York, where he filled for some time the positions of musical director and operatic manager, sometimes one and sometimes both. He picked up fragments of opera companies which had failed, and gave performances of most of the operas common to the public of that day. These performances were never very successful, and had little effect upon the public.

Senor Mary's Company of Havana returned again to New York in 1850 and this time they had a musical force of great



ability. The chorus was large and well trained; the orchestra was equally rich. Arditi was the musical director and conductor. The leading vocal artists were Telesco, Steffanone, Salvi, Badial, Marini, and many others who were only second to them. The Park Theater had burned in 1848, and Castle Gardens was the prominent play-house of the day. After giving a couple of performances in Astor Palace and Nibbles Castle, the Havana Company opened in Castle Gardens. For many years Castle Gardens had been given over to the invading hords from Europe and remained for some time the most prominent play-house in New York. In these three play houses during the summer the Havana Company performed "Nonna", Verdi's "Attila", "La Favorita", "Lucia", "L'Elisir D'Amore", "I'Puritani", "Lucrezia Borgia", and "Ernani". This latter opera was always given by any opera company if they had a soprano who could come near filling the role of "Elvira", and the Havana Company had two sopranos who could fill the role, namely Steffanone and Tedesco. This summer there appeared with this Company a singer, Angiolina Bosio, who had no reputation and who did not gain recognition from the audience the first night; in a short time, however, they became aware that she was a great artist. In Europe she had appeared at most of the Capital cities except Paris and London, and had received no notice at all. After her New York success she again returned to Europe and gained the





fame which was due her. She had a beautiful, silvery, penetrating soprano voice, and a remarkable technique; her phrasing being the height of art. In acting, however, she lacked a good deal. She never entered into the part, but merely went on the stage as Bosio and sang a role. She appeared at her best in a comedy part where her beautiful eyes helped her with her part. The two seasons which she spent in New York were an immense help to the education of the New York opera-going public. She died April, 1859, in the height of her career and powers, being only thirty-five years of age.

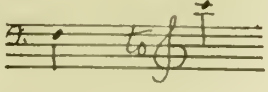


CHAPTER VIII  
OPERA DURING THE TIME OF  
JENNY LIND'S CONCERT TOUR IN THIS COUNTRY

In 1851 Catarini Barili-Patti appeared for the last time in New York as Nonna. This was the last time that America has heard the old style of Italian singing. Catarini Barili-Patti was the mother of the later Adelini Patti, who by a strange coincidence began her wonderful career in the town where her mother had uttered her last notes.

Signorina Teresa Parodi made her appearance in New York as a Prima Donna and won great and well deserved favor in the year 1850. Jenny Lind appeared, however, about this time, and her popularity allowed very little attention to be given to other less brilliant artists. Jenny Lind remained in this country for some years, but only as a concert singer, and space will not be taken for the discussion of this famous singer. Alboni came from Europe where she had already gained fame, unannounced and was received at her first performance with enthusiasm. She possessed one of the most remarkable voices that the world has ever



heard. Because of her ungainly figure she could never become a really famous Prima Donna, but as a vocalist she was unsurpassed. She had a contralto voice of unsurpassed volume, with a range from  which was identical throughout although a little thin in the upper portion. Her contribution to the musical education in New York was great.

Henrietta Sontag, the great rival of Malibran, appeared at Metropolitan Tripler Hall on September 27, 1852, in concert. Sontag had an unusual experience in life as well as a remarkable career upon the stage. She became famous almost immediately after her appearance because of a beautiful voice, fine vocal technique, good acting, and a beautiful personal appearance. After delighting all Europe with her artistic singing, she was secretly married, in 1828, to Count Rossi, a Sardinian nobleman, because his family objected. The marriage took place in 1829 under painful circumstances to young Sontag. She then retired from the stage, and lived in privacy until the Count was ruined in the Revolution of 1848. She then began to sing under the name which had earned her fame as a singer, and Europe was delighted to find that she had lost none of her ability. Sontag came to New York when she was forty-seven but she appeared far younger.

Sontag's voice was a pure soprano of a good compass and of only ordinary power, but it was very remarkable





because of its angelic beauty. She had a wonderful technique, and she rivaled the most skillful violin player in running scales and arpeggios, both in rapidity and exactness. As an actor she was good in parts, which required a serene and calm presentation, but in tragic or comic parts she lacked ability. Sontag's court life had given her a refinement which one rarely finds among singers; she was reserved and retiring and never approached a Bohemian style. Her trip to America cost her her life; she died in Mexico of cholera on June 17, 1854.



CHAPTER IX  
MARIO AND GRISI

In the year 1853 Falstaff brought Grisi and Mario to this country, and also Edward Fry Bernard Nelmann, Maurice Strakosch and others. James Hackett, who was also a notable manager of this time, brought many famous European singers to America. Falstaff and Hackett both made failures of their tours. Max Maretzek, a prominent musical director and conductor of New York took advantage of these failures, and from time to time gathered the members of these disbanded opera companies together and gave performances of Italian Opera in New York. Some of the singers who appeared under Maretzek between 1844 and 1869 were Sontag, Alboni, Steffanoni, La Grange, Grazzaniga, Signors Brignoli, Susini, Amodio, Erani, Bellini, Mazzolini, etc. As a prodigy, Adeline Patti first appeared at a concert given under Maretzek June 8, 1852, where Parodi was the star attraction. Her first appearance in opera was made in 1859 under the management of Bernard Uhlmann and Maurice



Storakosch in "Lucia de Lammermoor", at the Academy of Music.

It would hardly be in keeping with this article to pass over the name of Mario, one of the greatest tenors, who appeared in this country, without a sketch of his life. There is some uncertainty about the date of Mario's<sup>1</sup> birth, but it is agreed that it could not have been later than October 17, 1810. His father had been a general in the army, and Mario, after ten years in Turin Military Academy, became an officer in the Piedmontese Guard. He went to Paris in 1836 and immediately became a great favorite in society. He was gifted for the operatic stage, having all the style, face and figure of an ideal Italian gentleman. He was then only an amateur, and totally unfitted for public singing. He was constantly tempted to sign contracts for appearances in Paris, and after much urging upon the part of his friends, and some embarrassment for want of funds, he signed his first name "Mario" to a contract. His full title was 'Mario Cavaliere Di Candia', and it was because of his noble birth that he declined to sign his name to a contract as a singer. Mario spent a short time in study under the great singing master Michelet Ponchard and greatest of all, Bordogni. On November 30, 1838, at about the age

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1. Grove's Dictionary of Music, page 58, edited by A. Fuller Maitland, published by Macmillan Co., New York, 1907.





of twenty-eight, he made his first appearance in the role of "Robert le Diable". Although his voice was not at all ready for the stage, his success was assured from the first. In 1840 he passed to Italian Opera, which was more suited to him. On June 6, 1839, he made his first appearance in London in "Lucrezia Borgia". The vocal command which he afterwards gained was unthought of at that time; and his acting lacked much, although it did show that he had much talent as an actor. As a singer of romance, Mario was unsurpassed, and in the drawing room he gained much of his success. Mario sang for years with the famous Grisi and finally married her. Mario and Grisi favored high living and the best was not good enough for them. Mario died in Rome on December 11, 1883, in want.

Signora Grisi<sup>1,2</sup> was born at Milan on July 28, 1805. Her father was Gaetano Grisi, a soldier, and her mother was in all probability a singer because she came from a family of singers. Grisi's sister, Carlotta Grisi, was also a singer but her dancing gained her more fame than her singing. Grisi's instructions began with her sister Carlotta after which she shifted to Filippo Celli. Grisi made her debut at the age of seventeen, at Milan, and slowly but surely

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1. Grove's Dictionary of Music, Vol. II, page 58, edited by A. Fuller Maitland, published by Macmillan Co., New York, 1907.

2. Great Singers, by Georg T. Ferris, Second Series, page 67, published by D. Appelton & Co., New York, 1897.



began to build her voice and fame. She became dissatisfied with her engagement at Milan, and being unable to secure her release from her contract by law, fled to Paris where she was engaged at the Italian Theater. Grisi's main engagements from this time on were mainly in Paris and London, although she made short engagements in all the principal cities of Europe. She was for years a member of the famous Rubini quartet and later of the Mario quartet. By her husband, Signor Mario, she had three daughters. In the year of 1869 she left London to pay a visit to Berlin. While there she caught a severe cold; inflammations of the lungs set in, and after a short time she died.

In the season of 1854, on September 4, Mario and Grisi made their first appearance in America at Castle Garden in "Lucrezia Borgia". Susini, a former cavalry colonel, the possessor of a noble bass voice, was the Duke. The prices of seats had been raised to three dollars, and choice seats were put up for auction. The advent of these distinguished artists aroused some interest without producing any enthusiasm. The debut of these two artists was successful but no profound impression was made until the second week when Grisi appeared as "Norma". The appearance of both these artists was fine. Although Grisi was past her prime in age, her voice was still superb. Mario was in his prime and his voice gave the audience all



that was desired. The New York public, however, felt somewhat disappointed. These great artists sang well, indeed, but they brought nothing new. They sang the same operas that Alboni and Salvi had sung before them. New York had also come to like dramatic as well as beautiful singing. While Crisi sang with a dramatic power unequaled, she was a fading flower and Mario lacked the dramatic power if we may judge from the following criticism of that day on Mario's singing of the role of "Edgardo" in "Lucia di Lammermoor".

"Nay, even in pathos, when pathos should have been grand, we found the great Mario wanting. We listened in vain for the heart-rendering tones in which Edgardo knowing by premonition the answer he will receive should exclaim 'Di Che Mai di Chi Mai di Chi prangete?' and in vain for that cry of anguish which is wrung from him when the question is answered. The one was a beautiful vocalized phrase, the other an exquisite diminished note; only that and nothing more. Signor Mario has the sweetest tenor voice in the world, and is supreme master of all delicate effects; he is the price<sup>n</sup> of Romance singers, but there are effects which are beyond the reach of the romance. So at least we think, and we find that our demands are not alto-





gether requirements but are the reminiscences of past delights. Shall we ever see or hear again a Ravenhood - fierce, gloomy, passionate, abandoned alternately to his haughty pride, his implacable revenge, and his devoted love? Is it because we have grown a few years older, and more world-worn that music and doleful tales can thrill our hearts no longer? Or is it true that the words from no other lips can so make music with our heart strings?"<sup>1</sup>

The opening of the Academy of Music occurred on October 2, 1854. Mario and Crisi were the two artists appearing, and "Norma" was the opera given. This Academy of Music was a theater built in New York for the production of Opera, and served this purpose until the building of the Metropolitan. Although large crowds attended each evening's performance, the amounts paid the singers were so high that by December of 1854, less than three months, the managers were in bankruptcy. Mr. Hackett, who was manager for Mario and Crisi then took them, with their Company, to Boston for a brief visit; from there they then returned to the Old Metropolitan Theater for a few performances after which they departed for Europe. Before leaving this Company we shall speak briefly of Signora

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1. Richard Grant White, in Century, Vol. 2, n.s., page 195, June, 1882.



Vestvali, a contralto, who appeared with the Company. She was a very tall woman and, according to critics, so beautiful that she dazzled her critics so that they could only speak well of her. She had a contralto voice, very sympathetic, and of unusual compass, but which lacked much in training. Her public soon found this out and as a consequence she soon disappeared.



## CHAPTER X

## THE OPENING OF THE ACADEMY OF MUSIC

The Academy of Music was re-opened on the 19th of February, 1855, under the management of Ole Bull, a distinguished Norse violinist of the period. He leased the Academy for a short season, and under him appeared the artists Cololildi, Patti, Vestvali, Brignoli, and Badiali. The Norse, however, went to ruin almost immediately, lasting hardly two months. Other managers, however, were willing to venture, and in April of 1855, the distinguished baritone of that period, Amodio, appeared in "Il Trovatore". The opera at once became a favorite, and so also did the singer whom it introduced to the New York public. Amodio had a beautiful baritone voice of great sweetness and richness, which was almost as flexible as a "tenore di grazia". His vocalization was remarkably good, and his simple and serene style pleasing; he had little dramatic power and was physically unfit for the stage, being short and extremely heavy. A critic says that when he appeared





in one of the antique costumes his appearance was not unlike a plum pudding set upon sausages. His voice was so beautiful and his style so pleasing that in spite of his defects he was the favorite with New York for some years. Signor Brignoli, who appeared as Manrico in the same opera, also became popular in spite of all defects. He possessed a light lyric voice which he produced so far forward and with so much nasal twang that it sounded much like the bleating of a sheep. On the stage he was as awkward as a mechanical man, and his high and long continued favor is a puzzle. There was a short but furious strife between rival singers, rival agents and rival managers during the spring of 1855. This disappeared in a short time, and was forgotten in the arrangements for the appearance of the "La Grange Opera Company", named after the leading prima donna. Madam La Grange had a soprano voice of extraordinary compass and a very pleasing quality. It was not powerful, but it had reaching power, and could be heard through the din of any finale. She had developed her vocal technique to a height attained only by a few of the greatest. Her failure to become one of the great prima donnas was probably because of her appearance. She was not ugly but her figure could not be considered satisfactory for the stage and her manner and voice lacked sympathy.

With Madame La Grange appeared a tenor by the name



of Mirate. He was a very handsome man, and possessed a robust tenor voice, which was fresh and of a delicious sympathetic quality, and well delivered. His defect was a heaviness in style. The audience found him dull and his popularity lasted hardly one season.

During the season of 1856, the same Company held performances in the Academy of Music. The operas given in New York at this date were the same as those given all over the world, Verdi, Donizetti, Meyerbeer, and occasionally Rossini. The winter season of 1857-1858 introduced two artists of distinguished ability to the audiences at the Academy of Music, - Madame D'Angri and Carl Formes. Madame D'Angri had a rich and full contralto voice, and she sang with an impassioned manner, which gave her, in a large degree, a certain kind of a dramatic power. She was not attractive personally, and made her principal success as the gipsy mother, Azucena, in *Il Trovatore*.

Carl Formes lacked but two of the qualifications for a great lyric artist, - tact as an actor, and true intonation as a singer. He had a grand stage presence, a voice noble in quality, and in volume, a fine dramatic style of singing in both tragic and comic roles. To all this he added that unnameable quality which interests irrespective of skill and art. He was very impressive both as Bertrand in "*Robert le Diable*", and as Liporello in "*Don Giovanni*",



but he sang out of tune so much that he gave as much pain as pleasure to his sensitive listeners.

In the spring of 1858, at Burton's Theater on Chambers Street, Ronconi made his first appearance as Dr. Dulcamara in "L'Elisire d'Amore". The Adina was "Madame La Grange", but the interest of all was concentrated upon Ronconi. With them he at once took a place as one of the greatest artists that had been seen upon the operatic stage. He seemed to be able to play almost equally a comedy or dramatic part.

In the autumn of 1858 the same company opened in the Academy of Music, with one new singer, Signorina Piccolomini. She had created quite a sensation in Paris in 1857, and she came to reap her share of the American rewards. She appeared first in "La Traviata", before a New York audience, on the night of October 20, 1858. In the role of Violetta she had won a great and peculiar distinction. On the notices for that evening appeared the announcement that no late-comer would be seated until the conclusion of the Brindisi by Mille Piccolomini. This was the first notice of this kind to appear in America. Mille Piccolomini had a light lyric soprano voice of good compass, flexible and quite pleasing in quality. There were very many amateurs who were as good as she but yet she won her own peculiar success for some time.





## CHAPTER XI

## ADELINA PATTI

On February 10, 1843, at the time when Mario was climbing to his heights, Adelina Patti<sup>1,2</sup> was born at Madrid. She was the youngest daughter of Salvatre Patti, a great singer in Italy. Patti as a girl showed great talent and was given instructions by her half brother, Etton Barili. She sang in concert from the time she was eight until she was eleven years of age, and then was wisely withdrawn from the singing world for some years.

After four years of rest she was taken on a short concert tour, and then at the age of sixteen made her debut in New York as "Lucia" during the latter part of the year 1859. She made her debut in London on May 14, 1861, and immediately her European success began. Her voice was of moderate power but of great range, reaching up to f". As an actress she was delightful in certain parts, and has not

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1. Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians, Vol. III, p. 654; edited by A. Fuller Maitland; published by Macmillan Co., New York, 1907.

2. Great Singers, by George T. Ferris, Second Series, p. 249; published by D. Appleton and Co., New York, 1897.



been surpassed as Rosina, Zerlina, and Dinorah. Adelina Patti gained one of the greatest successes which has ever come to any prima donna, but many critics say that she was not among the greatest of prima donnas. Their opinion is that Patti lived in an age barren of good singers, and that Patti was so much better than the singers of her time that she created a sensation.

A critic of Patti's time says of her: "I do not hesitate to express my doubts of her (Patti's) claims to the position of a great prima donna. She is the best of her time, but her time is barren of great singers."<sup>1</sup>

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1. Richard G. White, in Century, Vol. II, n.s., page 206.



## CHAPTER XII

### AMERICA'S FIRST PRIMA DONNA

In the year 1860 Miss Clara Louise Kellogg, a New York girl, made her debut upon the operatic stage. She appeared in Verdi's *Rigoletto* as Gilda. She seemed to be much lacking in strength both bodily and vocally, and few critics thought that she might attain the fame which afterwards was hers. By exercise she developed her strength in body and voice, which improved her singing very much. She never became an effective dramatic singer, but she had the power of revealing dramatic conception of great delicacy, purity and sweetness. Miss Kellogg's voice was a very high soprano, pure, clear, fine, and close and firm in quality, which made it capable of the most exquisitely delicate and tender inflections. Her intonation was remarkably correct, and her dramatic power was suited to her voice. All her singing was marked by a fine and pure intelligence.

In 1861 the Civil War began and for the time being the performance of opera received little attention or money. After the war was over the country was so busy rebuilding its-self that it could not give any time to opera, and so for about ten years 1861-71 America had few operatic performances.





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